

Humor in the School Library

Janet Plummer

The challenge of dealing with the spontaneity of children's unpredictable and sometimes inadvertently humorous comments is what attracts me to the elementary school library/media center. Student humor lightens the everdemanding work of teaching and makes it possible to look forward to each new day with great anticipation.

Humorous comments fly when the students are gathered for storytelling in the media center. On one occasion I was probing for the word "typhoons" in a fifth grade discussion about storms that occasionally hit Hawaii and Japan. "What do you call those winds?" I asked. "Torpedo winds" came a reply. At another time I asked, "What do I mean by the word "defense?" and heard, "It's like a wall that goes around a house."

Sometimes it's a matter of interpretation. I asked a fourth grader what moss was, and he replied very matter-of-factly, "They look like butterflies." And once I announced that we would be painting a mural, which caused some of the students to look puzzled. When I asked for a definition of a mural, one student quipped, "It looks like a kind of horse!" (A mule!)

Students can come up with extraordinary words of their own. A few days before Christmas one year, a third grader wanted to read a story she had written about the three wise men. I listened as she struggled with the names of the gifts they had brought: "Gold, Mire, and Frankenstein." (None of the students laughed, but I had to excuse myself from the room for a short time.) One student, noticing the gentle rain outside, observed, "It's just a-jizzlin." Another identified a colorful assortment of tulips as "bloomers." And the same student who had explained that one of the two platforms in a lake she had visited was for diving and the other was for sunburn, went on to write that she had "divided" into the water.

Notes from students also include elements of humor. A third grader insisted that he had been falsely accused of talking during story hour:

Ms. Plummer,

I didn't do it. I always get blamed for everything. Truth will prevale!

One second grader wrote this apology for jumping over a chair in the media center:

Dear Mss plummer

am sorry. I juped in the libey over the cheir. I now I was not post to do it. I post to be nice.

And during the first few weeks of school, a first grader was asked to write her name and grade number on her book card. She looked up at me seriously and said, "I'm having trouble with my "ones" (which made me wonder about the traumas ahead when she got to the "twos").

But my favorite comment was this original from a second grader: "Ms. Plummer, you shine my day!" There's something about elementary school children that delights the soul. I wouldn't trade this job for anything in the world. ■



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